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ABSTRACT

This document presents the proposal for the orientation program for new students and faculty at the State University of New York at Buffalo. In the interest of coordinating and expanding the various University orientation programs and providing a common university study focus, the following structure is recommended: (1) that summer planning conferences be extended to include transfer students; (2) that the fall orientation be conceived as a program for the entire University, not just for new students; (3) that orientation be an ongoing year-long process coordinated with summer planning conferences and continuing through the spring, when a special program is held to help those students making major-field decisions; (4) that a new faculty orientation program be initiated; (5) that the University adopt a major problem theme as a task for the year and that orientation be used as a way to initiate and define the problem; (6) that faculty and upperclassmen be drawn into the advising process formally rather than to keep all such contacts on the informal level; and (7) that to accomplish all of this, a University Orientation Committee be established to coordinate these efforts. (Author/HS)

ED 063869

SUNY/Buffalo

Student Affairs Division

ORIENTATION PROPOSAL

1969-1970

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Summary - ORIENTATION PROPOSAL

This is a brief summary of the proposals contained in the expanded report 1969-70 Orientation Proposal.

INTRODUCTION

In the interest of coordinating and expanding the various University orientation programs and providing a common university study focus, the following structure is suggested.

1. That summer planning conferences be extended to include transfer students.

2. That the fall orientation be conceived as a program for the entire University, not just for new students.

3. That orientation be an ongoing year long process that is coordinated beginning with summer planning conferences and continuing through the spring when a special program is held to help those students making major field decisions.

4. That a new faculty orientation program be initiated.

5. That the University adopt a major problem theme as a task for the year and that orientation be used as a way to initiate and define the problem.

6. That faculty and upperclassmen be drawn into the advising process formally rather than to keep all such contacts on the informal level.

7. That to accomplish all of this a University Orientation Committee be established to coordinate these efforts.

SUMMER PLANNING CONFERENCES:

In Evaluation of the 1968 "Experimental Conference" by Dr. John Andrews, Assistant Professor, Policy Sciences and Mrs. Helen Wyant, Instructional Services, indicate that discussion groups led by trained, competent leaders during the time formerly devoted to presentations from various offices, were positively received. (see appendix II)

It is recognized that a "need hierachy" exists for new students. Questions pertaining to academic procedures, regulations and other information are important needs which must be met before the freshman can begin to familiarize himself with the University and the educational opportunities available to him. The group advisement meetings, the individual advisement interview, the placement tests and eventually the mechanical operations in pre-registration effectively and efficiently meet these needs. The conference design proposed in this report attempts to develop planning conferences in such a way as to keep the advisement process intact, to relieve the high anxiety level as early in the conference as possible and to free a block of time for concentrated group discussions.

To this end, the following is recommended:

1. It is suggested that the Conferences be expanded from two and a half to three days.

2. The discussion groups would repeat the experimental pattern of last year -- dealing with such questions as the University as a place to live and learn and the expectations and anxieties of freshmen.

3. It is recommended that each group be led by a faculty member, or appropriate staff person.

4. 12-15 leaders will be required for each conference. A pool of 20 should suffice for the summer.

5. A training program would be required (not sensitivity group trainer preparation).

6. One conference would be designated as a continuous orientation-advising experiment during the freshman year in which the faculty group leaders would become advisors for the 12 students in their group for the freshman year.

7. It is recommended that the design and implementation for this program be via a Planning Board composed of the following representatives:

   University College Administration
   University College Adviser appointed from University College
   Student Affairs Division Representative
   Student Association Representative
   Student elected from the "Summer Aides"
   Faculty member from faculty discussion leaders
   Resource person skilled in group design

TRANSFER STUDENTS

Because this group has special needs, it is recommended that separate summer conferences be arranged. The plan for these conferences would be similar to the others but the content different. Again, the Summer Planning Board would construct these conferences concentrating on adequate evaluation of previous work and accurate advice on their programs.

Former transfer students might be employed to lead supportative group discussions.

NEW FACULTY

This group needs integration into University life. The University would benefit from fresh thoughts unhampered by local habit or hostility resulting from frustration. Periodic luncheons could be arranged to discuss academic policies,

research funding and special programs, i.e., equal opportunity, campus resources and personnel. Student interests could be presented such as: S.D.S., Black Student Union, Foreign Student Office.

A Steering Committee of new and old faculty and a Student Coordinator could arrange such programs with arrangements made by one of the President's assistants. This group might also work with The Council on International Studies in arranging a foreign faculty program.

Questions and suggestions from this group can be fed into the various University structures.

EXCEPTIONAL GROUPS

We shall continue to have extraordinary groups of students enter the University. It is imperative that their special needs be considered. A committee with a direct line to the top administration should be arranged to work with these programs. This committee might include representatives from:

The Office of Equal Opportunity Coordinating Office
School of Social Welfare
Faculty Senate
University College
Office of Student Affairs
Representative Students from these Groups

SEPTEMBER ORIENTATION

This program should complement the other programs. A wide variety of cultural, social and academic activities are valuable in generating zest and excitement. Here is where the University Theme should be initiated through the coordinated effort of September's Orientation Committee -- especially through academic panels, lectures and discussions. A Convocation is suggested wherein the President of the University would state the theme for the year. The program would be a University orientation, not a freshman orientation. This would call for an expansion of the Orientation Committee to include faculty and graduate students, as well as student affair representatives.

UNIVERSITY THEME

This proposal suggests a university theme each year. The specific topic should be determined by a steering committee (which will be described later in the proposal) but could be, "effective teaching, classroom learning and alternatives", "equal education opportunities", or "the role of students in university governance." This University Theme concept would be a good vehicle for pursuing the problems discussed in the recent Faculty Senate Executive Committee program on student-faculty relationships.

Expanding each program to include this theme provides the following:
1. A university-wide goal and/or focus.

2. Sense of University participation by newcomers.
3. Allowing for university self-consciousness about the educational process.
4. Assumes all members of the university community (faculty, staff and students) could share in contributing ideas, research papers, models, etc., on the common theme.
5. Provide a vehicle for student, faculty, administration interaction.

Implementation would require endorsement by:

1. Provosts
2. Faculty Senate
3. Student Associations

Support by:

1. Office of the Vice-President for Academic Development
2. Division of Student Affairs
3. Center for the Study of Higher Education

It would seem appropriate and advantageous for the Student Affairs Division to house and supply the administrative support necessary to coordinate and implement the program. The Center staff could give direction to the research and evaluation stages, and the very nature of the academic emphasis and developmental scope places it clearly within the Office of the Vice-President for Academic Development.

A steering committee should be formed to select the problem, to develop the mechanisms that will encourage broad involvement, to establish policy and to initiate operational activities. The Committee should be composed of one student appointed by each of the five student associations, three faculty appointed by the Faculty Senate, and representatives from the three sponsoring units (Center for the Study of Higher Education, Student Affairs Division, and Office of Vice-President of Academic Development).

The Steering Committee would encourage and implement:

1. Faculty and staff teams
2. Student Teams
3. Mixed teams
4. Independent research
5. Bulletin Board courses on the theme
6. Workshops
7. Symposia
8. Special lecturer and panels
9. Periodic university symposia to review progress
10. Spring Convocation on the theme, inviting other figures from other institutions.

CONTINUING ORIENTATION

A substantive program will require a sustained effort.

New student needs should be considered after an initial adjustment is made. During 68-69 the Office of Student Affairs held small group meetings with freshmen and transfers to exchange information and solve problems. Student sponsors used in the September Orientation might function in these groups.

An open forum by departments for students having to make major field decisions.

Small groups of freshmen and transfers should be organized to evaluate and project orientation programs.

Comparisons with other institutions' orientation programs should be made including Canada and other countries.

THE COLLEGES AND ORIENTATION

New university groupings effected by the collegiate system will call for re-evaluation and re-orientation of the "orientation" program. Factors involved would be:

1. New ways to introduce various college themes to potential students.
2. New ways to introduce Masters to new students.
3. Balance between university-wide interests and collegiate interests.
4. Structure of the 25% academic work to be done through the colleges.

COORDINATION AND EVALUATION

Administrative responsibility to coordinate and push this program should be in the hands of a University Orientation Committee. It is recommended that the secretariat and administrative office should be the Division of Student Affairs. A full time administrator would be called for to serve as coordinator. (University Orientation Coordinator(?)). He would function as head of the University Orientation Committee as well as administrative officer of the University Theme Steering Committee.

The University Orientation Committee composition and responsibilities would be as follows:

Compositions

Member from:

1. Summer Planning Conference Planning Board - University College
2. September Orientation Committee - Student Association - Student Affairs
3. Foreign Orientation Committee - Student Association - Student Affairs
4. Faculty Orientation Committee - Office of the President

5. University Theme Steering Committee
6. College Masters - when functioning

Responsibilities

1. Coordinate activities of orientation programs during the September and February (inter session) Orientation period.
2. Coordinate calendar dates for various programs.
3. Discuss future orientation programs in light of developing collegiate structure.
4. Evaluate effectiveness of orientation programs.
5. Coordinate research needs of various programs.
6. Responsibility for orientation programs and needs not specifically designated to any particular group - encouraging faculty and departmental orientation programs.
7. Coordinate information exchanged from various orientation programs.

Several professional schools have not been mentioned - Dental School, Medical School, Law School. Their integration at this point appears impractical and premature. Interest in them, however, should not be neglected.

Research projects related to the program should function in order to evaluate what happens. The University Orientation Committee should be responsible for coordinating the research needs.

Special funds should be made available to aid the University Orientation Committee for projects and research. Special funds and research grants might be sought by the University Orientation Committee from within the University and elsewhere.

R E P O R T

ORIENTATION PROPOSAL

Introduction

This orientation report contains several proposals for new programs as well as modification of some existing ones. Therefore the report is divided into the following sections: Summer Planning Conferences, Transfer Orientation, University Theme, September Orientation, New Faculty Orientation, Continuing Orientation, the Colleges and Orientation, and Coordination and Evaluation.

Each of these proposals can be considered and modified separately, but whatever form each finally takes, coordination between them is essential. The proposals themselves do not necessarily describe the program in a detailed design. Rather at this stage they are descriptive of the purposes and the relationships to other programs, but this report does suggest mechanisms for developing them into detailed plans.

These proposals are aimed at stimulating both faculty and student groups to become more involved in University affairs through a refocusing of orientation on University-wide issues which involve the entire community. In this way orientation becomes an important mechanism for building an environment where creative approaches to issues can be developed and encouraged. It also stresses that the individual can have impact and influence and his contributions are sought.

The need for an orientation program grows out of an awareness of two primary factors; that new members of any organization do not feel acclimated initially, and that they will form their impressions of roles and expectations strictly from their informal contacts and collisions with the organization if no formal mechanism is provided. The informal socialization process occurs even if a formal one exists, so the question every organization

needs to ask itself is, what can be done to supplement and/or correct the information informally available to maximize the value the individual and the organization represent to each other.

The goal of orientation therefore is to accelerate learning about the University and the student/faculty/staff roles within it so that each person can more rapidly use the resources of the University.

Thus far this is rhetoric of the nature of known platitudes. What is important is attempting to accomplish such goals. The primary recommendations in this report are listed below. The following sections suggest ways of dealing with these recommendations and goals.

1. That summer planning conferences be extended to include transfer students.
2. That the fall orientation be conceived as a program for the entire University, not just for new students.
3. That orientation be an ongoing year long process that is coordinated beginning with summer planning conferences and continuing through the spring when a special program is held to help those students making major field decisions.
4. That a new faculty orientation program be initiated.
5. That the University adopt a major problem theme as a task for the year and that orientation be used as a way to initiate and define the problem.
6. That faculty and upperclassmen be drawn into the advising process formally rather than to keep all such contacts on the informal level.
7. That to accomplish all of this a University Orientation Committee be established to coordinate these efforts.

Summer Planning Conference

The planning conferences have proven to be very effective ways of handling the advisement-registration process. They have also contributed significantly towards reducing the freshman's anxiety about being lost in a huge, impersonal institution by having his first days here be in a relatively small group (150) with opportunity to explore and hear about the University and its resources. Having time to socialize with other freshmen meets another important need of the new student.

During the summer of 1968, an experimental conference was held (see attached report Appendix II) which introduced a discussion group concept replacing the time usually devoted to presentations from various offices and groups on campus. The basic objectives of these groups, which were led by a faculty or staff member, was to increase the students awareness of his role, of the social processes that take place around him, of his problem solving approach and alternatives, and of his own goals.

The evaluation of the experimental conference indicates that this conference went further in developing a "social learning" process than the standard conferences achieved. "Social learning" in this context means concern with revising and developing one's perceptions of the environment in ways that lead to revising inaccurate stereotypes and expectations, altering attitudes and feelings which ultimately can lead to behavior change. The preliminary report on the experimental conference clearly indicates that there was sufficient success to suggest extending some of the features of the conference into the 1969 conferences.

It is recognized that a "need hierarchy" exists for new students and

that questions pertaining to academic procedures, regulations and other information are important needs which must be met before the freshman can begin to familiarize himself with the University and the educational opportunities available to him. The group advisement meetings, the individual advisement interview, the placement tests and eventually the mechanical operations in pre-registration effectively and efficiently meet these needs. The conference design proposed in this report attempts to develop planning conferences in such a way as to keep the advisement process intact, to meet the high anxiety, immediate needs as early in the conference as possible and to free a block of time afterwards for concentrated group discussions.

It is clear that some activities from the standard conference were better received than others and should be retained, such as the talk given by the Vice President or Associate Vice President of Student Affairs and the campus tour with an upperclassman. In order to include some of these items plus have time for the group discussions and the advisement process, it is recommended that the conferences be extended from 2 1/2 to 3 days by adding an extra meal and extending check-out times. This could be arranged through the University Housing Office.

The discussion groups would have the same objectives as they did for last year's experimental conference, which means dealing with such questions as the University as a place to live and learn, the expectations and anxieties of freshmen, and getting the freshman to look at his goals and his ways of reaching them. It is recommended that each group be led by a faculty member or appropriate staff member and an upperclassman. It is hoped that the role of student aide can be designed so that he is also the upperclassman in the

discussion group. During each conference 12-15 discussion group leaders will be needed. With a pool of 20 group leaders each conference should be able to be staffed adequately. The group discussion leaders and upperclassmen would undergo a training program to prepare them for these roles. The research material from the experimental conference (questionnaires and taped interviews of freshmen from both standard and experimental programs) and the Instructional Services longitudinal study information will be helpful in designing an appropriate training program. Clearly some of the training program would be devoted to small group theory and techniques, since that is the basic format for this part of the conferences.

This proposal brings faculty as well as staff into the orientation-advisement process which will give us an opportunity to evaluate the possible roles they can assume in these processes.

Experimental Conference

It is recommended that one conference be designated as a continuous orientation-advising experiment in which the students would continue their relationship with their group leader during the freshmen year. This is recommended because it is probable that freshmen continue to have questions and concerns which fall between those handled by University College Advisers and the Student Counseling Center.

Each group of freshmen, group leader and upperclassman can decide whether they wish to meet occasionally as a group throughout the year or whether individual contact between the student and his group leader is preferable. Data would be collected regarding the frequency and nature of contact, and an evaluation of the importance of this arrangement would be sought from all involved. This evaluation will be most helpful in establishing

whether some such adviser role should be adopted for all freshmen. It would seem that commuters particularly would benefit from such a program, since they do not necessarily have the peer group constituency from which a resident gains information and support.

Implementation, Administration and Design

The responsibility for administering the planning conferences rests with University College. The program requires the attention and concern of one individual specifically delegated this responsibility. In addition, it is proposed that the responsibility for design and coordination with other orientation activities be given to a Planning Board with the following composition: University College administration, University College adviser appointed from University College, a representative from the Student Affairs Division, a representative from the Student Association, a student representative elected from the summer aides and a faculty member from the group of discussion leaders. In addition, a resource person skilled in group design, acting as a consultant during the planning and throughout the summer, ought to be involved. The Board would be charged with design and coordination for the entire planning conference schedule, as well as the special experimental program designated "continuous". They would also be responsible for seeing that an appropriate training program for upperclassmen and group discussion leaders was developed.

Transfer Orientation

There has been very little orientation programming for transfer students. Until recently, transfer students had never received a copy of the student handbook. The program has consisted mainly of a scheduled meeting with an academic adviser, a special luncheon with a number of short welcoming speeches and a special reception for transfers, faculty, staff and selected students. Other than this, it was assumed that transfer students would take part in as many of the September freshmen orientation activities as interested them.

Just as there exists a hierarchy of needs for freshmen, transfer students have questions, concerns and needs that take precedence over socialization and acclimation to the university environment. Registration, program specialization, credit evaluation from previously attended institutions, academic advisement of deficiencies acquired in transfer, as well as the special needs of housing and financial aid are critical concerns to the transferring student. Research is beginning to accumulate findings that describe the entering (two-year) transfer as a student with academic and vocational needs different from the rest of the academic community.

It is proposed that special summer planning conferences be scheduled for transfer students. Probably two conferences, on an experimental basis, should be scheduled. Although the outline of the conferences, can follow that of the proposed planning conferences for freshmen, the content for the transfer conferences will necessarily be different to meet the special needs of the transfer students. These questions however, should be resolved by the planners (the Summer Planning Board) in close consultation with experts on the transfer student.

The advisement process should include opportunities for transfers to meet with faculty advisers assigned to those students who have declared a major field. Special credit evaluation needed for departmental pre-registrants could be carried to departments through the U.C. advisement staff for quick handling. All attempts should be made to guarantee that by the time the student attends the planning conference or September registration, this information is available for him to be used in planning his academic schedule.

In addition, to accommodate those transfers missed during the summer, and to continue the orientation program for all transfers, a special program should be designed during September. This program should be scheduled to begin before the Fall registration period. University resource personnel should be made available to transfers before registration. Programs designed to expose students to faculty for academic program and career choice information should certainly be included in the design as well as placing students in contact with financial aid, off-campus housing and placement personnel.

After their concerns have been answered about the registration process, approval of transfer credit, and major field selection, transfer students have much the same concerns about the University and their role in it as freshmen do. A discussion group approach during the transfer summer planning conferences using the same format as for the freshmen would be equally as helpful to the transfer students. A way should be developed to involve upper-classmen already on campus who were transfer students with these new transfer students.

An extremely crucial area of concern is the kind of information exchanged between the admitted transfer and the University before the fall registration. Exchanging information before the rush of activities in September would afford the transfer student the opportunity to familiarize himself with University procedures and answer some important questions before the fall, as well as to help develop more accurate expectations, concerns and questions. Of critical importance in these transfer conferences is a clear process for approving transfer credit to facilitate the registration process.

The planning for both the summer and fall transfer programs should be coordinated. The responsibility for design and coordination could be given to a special committee or to the proposed Summer Planning Board. It must be pointed out that orientation for transfer students is a difficult and rather little understood problem. Designs, approaches and even assumptions should be dealt with as experimental and tentative. It is only through open experimentation and detailed evaluations that the process can be improved.

The University Theme

Although each of the specific orientation proposals can be implemented without great dependence on the others, the key concept proposed in this document lies in suggesting that the University turn its attention each year to a major problem or concern which higher education and this University faces.* The fall orientation program, expanded to include both orientation for new and involvement for all University members, will introduce the theme to the University by building it into the convocation and some of the panel discussions, as well as indicating ways that students, faculty and staff can become involved in dealing with the theme. Orientation therefore assumes a more active rather than passive character in providing a way for all members of the University community to participate in deliberation of concerns, questions and policies of significance to the entire community.

By promoting and stimulating interest (and fostering problem-solving task forces), on a university-wide basis, such significant, substantial resources and perspectives could be brought to bear that major contributions could be made to some of the most difficult questions facing higher education. Such an endeavor would establish this University as being self-couscious about the educational process in a unique way, and furthermore create the kind of attitude and climate which encourages individual commitment as well as individual influence and impact on the policies and policy-making processes.

*The specific topic should be determined by a steering committee (which will be described later in the proposal) but could be, "effective teaching, classroom learning and alternatives", "equal education opportunities", or role of students in university governance." This University Theme concept would be a good vehicle for pursuing the problems discussed in the recent Faculty Senate Executive Committee program on student-faculty relationships.

The proposal assumes that all members of the University community (faculty, staff and students) could share in contributing ideas, research papers, models, etc. on the common theme. The basic model proposed is similar to that used by the Faculty of Social Sciences and Administration for its planning days. In those, a topic of wide interest is selected, a focus is given to it by a speaker, discussion groups deal with it by bringing their varied experiences and viewpoints to bear, and an over-arching mechanism (usually a standing or ad hoc committee) is responsible for drawing all the ideas together and reporting back to the Faculty regarding policy issues or action steps that should be considered or taken. The university theme proposal would expand this model to include the entire University, involve a number of speakers and panels during fall orientation and in reoccurring programs throughout the year. In addition to discussion groups, carrying out the theme could involve such techniques as workshops, symposia, and credit-course work.

Involvement of students in a participative role with faculty and staff is a further objective of the proposal. Also increasing interaction within and between faculty and staff members who might not otherwise have made contact will have valuable consequences. It is not suggested that the program would involve overwhelming numbers of faculty, students and staff, although it might. But certainly it creates an opportunity for more to become involved, excited and productive towards the growth and development of the instutition. Implicit in this proposal is the development of a high morale, commitment and interest in the nature and the problems of the University. Depending upon just how the university theme concept is organized, the project opens the way for the creative energies of so many more of our faculty, students and staff, and perhaps even those outside dissatisfied fringes to participate

in and relate their concerns to this issue. Having a university-wide theme hopefully would have the effect of making the campus seem smaller and more inter-related through broad sharing of ideas on the common topic and through other mechanisms to be described in the section that follows on structure.

Structure and Implementation

Because of the broad nature of the proposal, and especially because of the heavy emphasis on the individual and "grass-roots" interest, it is suggested that it be endorsed by the appropriate Faculty Senate Committee as well as student government organizations. In addition we suggest that the program be jointly sponsored by the Office of the Vice-President for Academic Development, the Student Affairs Division and the Center for the Study of Higher Education. It would seem appropriate and advantageous for the Student Affairs Division to house and supply the administrative support necessary to coordinate and implement the program. The Center staff could give direction to the research and evaluation stages, and the very nature of the academic emphasis and developmental scope places it clearly within the Office of the Vice-President for Academic Development.

A steering committee should be formed to select the problem, to develop the mechanisms that will encourage broad involvement, to establish policy and to initiate operational activities. The Committee should be composed of one student appointed by each of the five student associations, three faculty appointed by the Faculty Senate, and representatives from the three sponsoring units (Center for the Study of Higher Education, Student Affairs Division, and Office of Vice-President of Academic Development).

It is proposed that fall orientation be used as a kickoff for this program by converting the freshmen convocation into an all-University convocation at which the theme is elaborated and the program outlined. During other parts of orientation, speakers and panels addressing themselves to this topic could be scheduled to indicate the scope and diversity of opinion and research.

Specific procedures and mechanisms for becoming involved, participating either through formal committee or organizing an ad hoc committee to deal with special portions of the problem would be developed by the Steering Committee. Faculty and staff teams, student teams, mixed teams, independent research, bulletin board courses on the theme, workshops, symposia, special lectures and panels are suggestive of the type of activities that could be initiated and encouraged by the steering committee. The activities around the theme would continue throughout the year. Special periods could be developed where interim reports and programs, designed to inform and bring together the various groups, were scheduled.

An exciting culminating event would be to have the University sponsor a conference on the theme in the Spring and invite participants from other institutions. A report of the proceedings could be published that would be of interest to broad segments of higher education.

This steering committee would also develop some mechanism for pulling together the ideas, reports, research, and proceedings of the year into a report to the President and appropriate bodies on policy issues and action programs which should be considered.

If a topic is selected that is of vital importance to faculty, students and staff, wide participation is possible. Even with a highly relevant topic

it is essential for the steering committee to develop mechanisms which encourage involvement. Research teams, discussion groups, retreats, workshops, experimental activities are only a partial listing of the kinds of involvement that should be encouraged. More people will contribute if they feel they will be heard, so a clear way of having each contribution considered by the group who would be preparing a final report on policy and action issues is essential.

The purpose of the program is to bring into the mainstream of discussion, by using a variety of techniques, approaches and stimuli, any university member who feels he has something to contribute. The commitment most certainly will vary, necessitating much flexibility and diversity in design and contribution.

VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT
STUDENT AFFAIRS
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION
COLLEGIATE COMMITTEE
COUNCIL OF PROVOSTS-DEANS

FACULTY SENATE
STUDENT ASSOCIATION
GRADUATE STUDENT ASSOCIATION
MED-DENT STUDENT COUNCIL
LAW STUDENT BAR ASSOCIATION
MFC STUDENT ASSOCIATION

ADMINISTERED BY STUDENT AFFAIRS DIVISION

UNIVERSITY THEME

STEERING COMMITTEE

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC DEVEL.

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER ED.

FIVE STUDENTS

THREE FACULTY

PROGRAMS, PROJECTS, LECTURES, PANELS, SYMPOSIA,
AD-HOC GROUPS, FORMAL STUDY GROUPS, ETC.

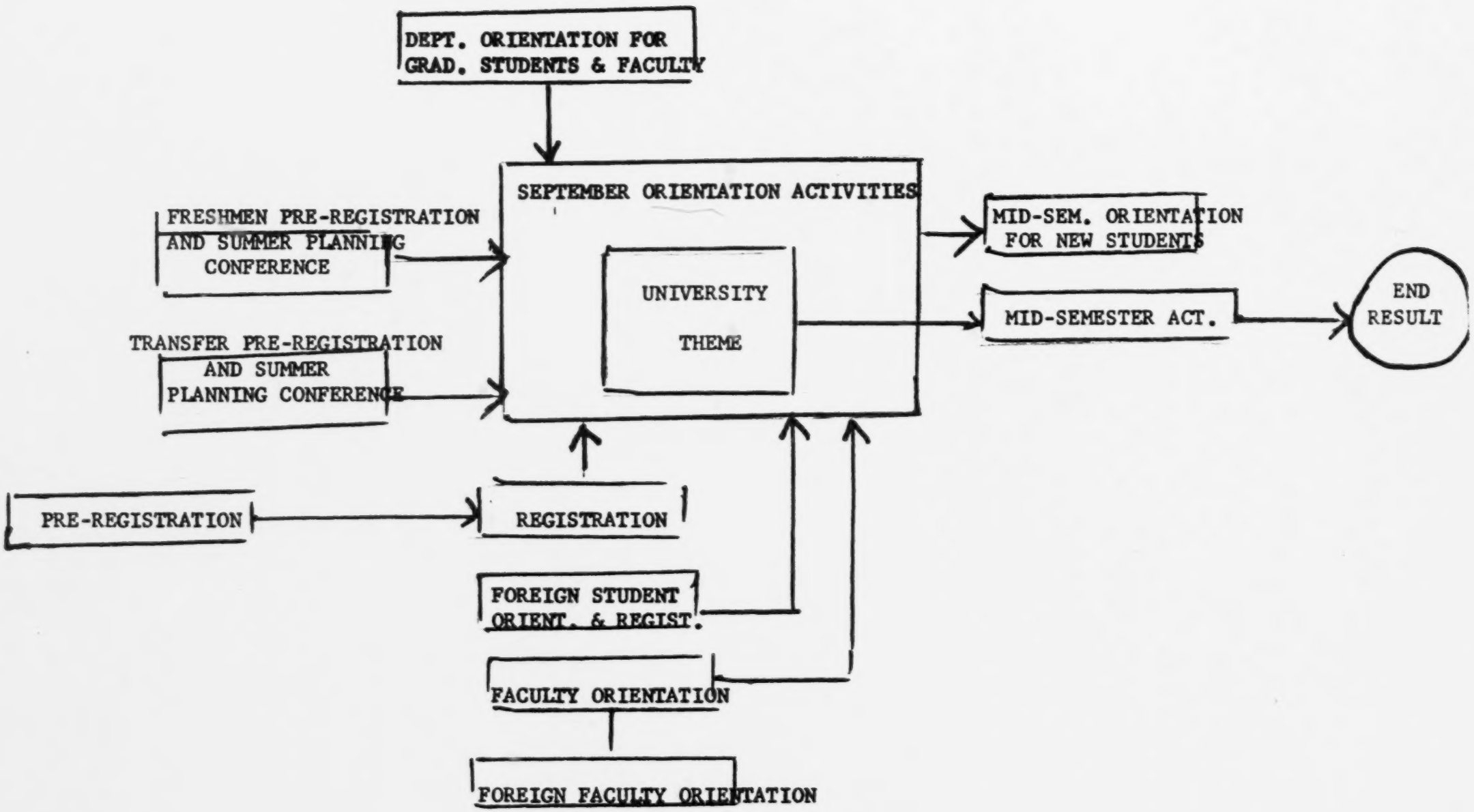
UNIVERSITY THEME ORGANIZATION

September Orientation

The September orientation period should be viewed as primarily the framework for the various special orientation programs. To support and complement the other orientation programs the September orientation program should consist of a myriad of activities, university-wide in nature, appealing to all segments of the academic community. The kinds of activities and events which were held for the September 1968 orientation which are described in the appendix on September orientation, should be continued. The wide variety of cultural, social and academic activities are valuable in generating spirit, zest, activity and excitment which will be carried into the fall semester.

A major focus for the September orientation period is the initiation of the University Theme. Activities of the Theme Steering Committee and the September Orientation Committee should be closely coordinated, especially in the academic panels, lectures and discussions that are planned. To begin this program, as well as to precede all the other academic scheduled activities, a university convocation is proposed, at which the President speaks to the entire University community. In his speech he would introduce the theme and give emphasis to its importance to the academic community.

A variety of special events--picnics, receptions, luncheons, and the like should also be scheduled to help mix and introduce people old and new. Certainly receptions for all new students, faculty and staff would seem appropriate. These should be attended by University officials, academic officials and key staff personnel.



THE ORIENTATION PROGRAM

The entire program should be scheduled for no more than a two to three day period and should be designed to introduce old and new members of the University community to the kinds of activities they should expect to have all during the year. The September orientation therefore functions as an all-university orientation. The topics of speakers, panels and other programs will be as interesting to members of the University who have been here before, as they would be to new members. The uncertainties around the September registration process leave scheduling and calendar arrangements at a slight impasse. Negotiations with appropriate offices (the University Calendar Committee) should occur quickly to guarantee September orientation a firm position in the fall.

The September Orientation Committee, presently operated out of the Division of Student Affairs, ought to be expanded to involve faculty and students, as well as the student affairs representatives. This would serve to broaden the scope and involvement needed for the September program to take on university-wide significance and participation.

Special Program Orientation

With the increase of special admissions programs, some concern and discussion must be initiated about the special orientation needs of these students. The overall objective in orientation is the elimination of barriers which prevent productive communication and understanding between all university members. Special needs may necessitate special programs, but broad involvement and the ability to participate in community development must be actively sought and recognized by all concerned in the orientation process. Thus, a concern for linking special admissions programs with university orientation is an important issue for further deliberation.

New Faculty Orientation

The University-wide new faculty orientation program has two primary objectives: broadening perspectives and actively involving faculty in University affairs. The program is designed to broaden the perspective and information new faculty receive about the University, by exposing them to information, issues, and problems other than departmental contacts and activities. The institutional interest and concern for new faculty would in itself be a welcome and new experience. In addition, it provides a process where important information is transmitted in a more accurate and personalized fashion, differing considerably from the present method of printed literature and unconfirmed advice.

The second objective is to develop a climate where new faculty can become more directly and actively involved in University operations. The great diversification of experience and knowledge brought from other institutions is invaluable and should be utilized. New faculty offer the institution a method of introducing information, new approaches and insights into the developing institutional structure. This value is too often overlooked, underestimated and just not utilized.

These goals could be accomplished by scheduling a series of luncheon-meetings throughout the year dealing with such topics as: organization and university academic policies, research funding, special university programs such as equal opportunity, university resources and personnel, etc. Members of the administration, faculty and staff involved in these areas could

describe the local situation, while new faculty could be encouraged to react based on their experiences and knowledge of such programs from other institutions. At these meetings some new faculty will be able to be of direct advisory assistance, while at other meetings hopefully, enough excitment and interest will be generated that temporary groups will form to deal further with the issues.

Also programs should be developed that put new faculty into contact with various formal and informal student groups such as Student Association officers, SDS, Black Students Association, commuters, transfer students, foreign students and others.

The value in new faculty meeting persons from various offices, projects, Faculty Senate and student groups goes far beyond their becoming merely informed about these matters. They will contribute ideas and efforts through the discussion mechanism, but also through their greater awareness of institutional operation, they should become more involved participants in faculty, student and general University activities.

The program should be developed by someone who would be aware of the interests and concerns of new faculty members. Perhaps one of the special faculty advisers to the President or one of the Assistants to the President would be appropriate to take planning responsibility for the program. A small advisory group of faculty (new and old) would be helpful in developing such programs.

In addition, it would be the responsibility of the faculty orientation committee to design a program for new foreign faculty. This should be closely coordinated with the Office of Foreign Student Affairs and the Office of International Education.

The new faculty group could also contribute uniquely to the University Theme, since their recent arrival should allow them to recall clearly how other universities are attempting to deal with the issues raised.

A similar orientation program at Case Institute of Technology had excellent results. The program design generated such interest and concern that the new faculty developed new topics and ways of dealing with important University issues. In several areas they wrote proposals to alleviate some of the institutional problems as they perceived them.

The program has the potential of developing some exciting new ways in which new faculty become involved in the educational development of the institution and should be seriously implemented, even on a limited scale.

Continuing Orientation

It would be naive to assume that any one orientation program or design will meet the needs of all incoming members to the University community. Further, different needs and questions arise as individuals are exposed to additional information, experience and institution and develop more personal perspectives. Orientation cannot be considered a program of one or two days, but a process in which needs change over time. It seems appropriate therefore, to try to develop programs, information and activities that respond to new students needs after three or six months into the year, in addition to the fall orientation.

During 1968-69 the Office of Student Affairs has held small group meetings with freshmen and transfer students. These meetings provide a valuable mechanism for exchange of information and an opportunity for new students to receive aid in problem areas that develop for them during the year. It is hoped that the student sponsors used in the September orientation, could become more involved in these and other similar meetings.

In addition, the advisement staff of University College should schedule open meetings before critical information periods such as drop-add periods and registration for general information and questioning. Special programs should be scheduled during the year to inform faculty and students of new programs and opportunities, such as the independent study and individual curricula - design options now available to students.

An important program which should be instituted is one which permits information exchange and interaction between departments and students having to make major field decisions. At some appropriate time, such as early spring, an open house program could be initiated in which students could

meet with department representatives to learn about the major field requirements, and career opportunities in each area. These should be scheduled enough in advance of the times for committing one's self to a major that a student has an opportunity to attend such group presentations for two or three areas of study. In addition, time should be scheduled to follow up with an individual visit to the department if necessary.

It is recommended that a small group of new freshmen and a small group of transfer students should be organized after September, to discuss and plan additional orientation programs for the year with members of the September Orientation Committee. Those experiencing the process should be involved in designing programs which meet their own needs as they arise.

The Colleges and Orientation

A whole set of different orientation designs might seem more advantageous and appropriate once the colleges begin to take life. As the colleges assume more importance as centers of activity orientation programming might more easily be organized by each individual collegiate unit. Whether collegiate orientations completely remove the need for university-wide or general orientation activities, or what kind of a balance should exist between collegiate responsibility and university-wide areas of concern and organization are questions which deserve considerable discussion.

It might be advisable to keep the summer planning conference intact and design some contact time with the masters and the colleges. Certainly if the colleges are made responsible for at least 25% of a student's academic program, advisement for the first semester would need to involve the colleges more closely. It is uncertain whether by summer planning students will have been able to select a college. In all cases, information and exposure to the collegiate environment would be a valuable experience.

In addition, it might become more appropriate for September orientation activities to be organized around and in the colleges. However, general university-wide orientation activities and programs are still encouraged. It is certain that the collegiate structure will limit, to some extent, the kinds of university-wide programming now offered, but it seems valuable to continue some larger programs for broadened scope and exposure.

The colleges could very easily fit into the university theme by offering specific mechanisms for involvement within the college structure and by

sponsoring some of the activities - lectures, seminars panels, symposia, etc. organized around the university theme.

The opening dates for the colleges, the selection process and the organization of personnel and service functions leave much of the future of orientation programming uncertain. Future planning and organization would be a responsibility of the University Orientation Committee.

Coordination and Evaluation

Orientation is viewed as a continuing process. The scope and mission of traditional orientation programs has been expanded and redeveloped to include all new members to the academic community. (Although not mentioned in the report, special orientation programs for university staff - secretarial, managerial and other personnel, should also be established. The University's Personnel Office should think seriously about the orientation and information needs of all University personnel). Orientation becomes an institutional concern and a process where community building occurs.

The report outlines a number of specific programs, beginning at different times, linking up at various points and continuing throughout the year. Coordination of information and program is an essential requirement for an effective total program.

To accomplish this coordination as well as guaranteeing continual institutional concern for orientation of new members a University Orientation Committee should be created. Administrative responsibility for orientation and the University Orientation Committee should rest with the Division of Student Affairs. The scope of the program and the major responsibility placed in the Division would most probably necessitate a full time position appointed to coordinate the program and its activities. This staff member would also head the University Orientation Committee as well as serve as administrative officer of the University Theme Steering Committee. It would seem advantageous for the Orientation Committee and the University Theme Committee to be linked by having the Student Affairs

representative serve on both groups. This will afford each separate program the coordination necessary to make each effective.

The University Orientation Committee will be composed of the chairman, coordinators or other heads responsible for the individual orientation programs. Thus it will be composed of a member from the Summer Planning Conference Planning Board, the September Orientation Committee, the Foreign Student Orientation Committee, the Faculty Orientation Committee and the University Theme Steering Committee. When the colleges become functional, the masters should be represented on this committee.

The University Orientation Committee would be responsible for coordinating the various orientation programs, the respective calendar and scheduling conflicts, information and its distribution as well as having the responsibility for orientation programs and needs not specifically designated to any particular group. Such programs are the mid-year orientation program for spring entrants and an orientation for graduate students. (An area not specifically handled in the report was the special needs of graduate students. Certainly an orientation program perhaps more closely linked to the Faculties and departments, would seem necessary. The University Orientation Committee would be responsible for suggesting the kind of program and mechanisms for implementation of just such new needs).

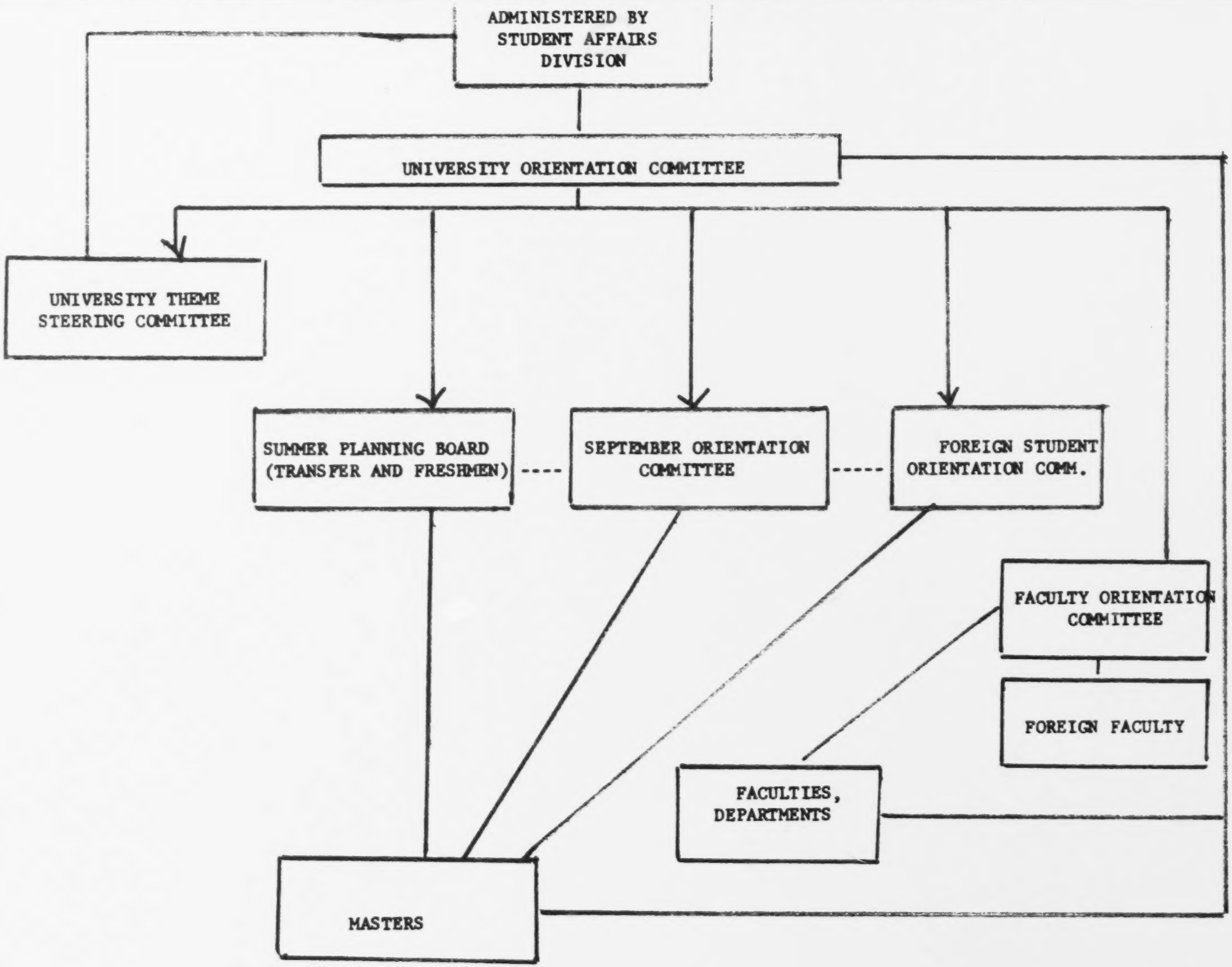
Another major responsibility and area of concern for the University Orientation Committee will be the role of the colleges and orientation. Just how the colleges will fit into the summer-advisement process, the registration process, the university theme and the orientation programs has not been discussed. The committee presents an excellent forum for these discussions.

This report has not dealt with the special orientation of the university professional programs (the Medical School, Dental School and Law School).

It seems premature and impractical to presently integrate these programs into the University Orientation Scheme, but certainly the topic deserves more serious attention. Involvement in the University Theme would seem more appropriate and should be actively sought.

Evaluation of each separate program, as well as the effectiveness of the total program; its goals, accomplishments and direction, cannot be overlooked. Too often, extensive programs are designed with no mechanism for evaluating their progress. In addition, research data could be accumulated which could be extremely helpful to other University agencies in planning, changing and evaluating their programs. The University Orientation Committee would also be responsible for coordinating the research needs of the various orientation programs and offering other assistance in dispersing and implementing their evaluations.

Special funds should be made available to aid the various programs, as well as the University Orientation Committee, in conducting such research. Possibly, the University Orientation Committee could be responsible for seeking out special funds and applying for research grants, from inside and outside the University, to stimulate such research. Certainly, the designs and organization, described in this report would be of interest to other institutions. Evaluation and research would be of value and all steps would be taken by the University Orientation Committee to enhance its own knowledge as well as aid others seeking the same ends.



COORDINATION OF ORIENTATION PROGRAMS

University Orientation Committee

Compositions:

1. Summer Planning Conference Planning Board - University College
2. September Orientation Committee - Student Association - Student Affairs
3. Foreign Orientation Committee - Student Association - Student Affairs
4. Faculty Orientation Committee - Office of the President
5. University Theme Steering Committee
6. College Masters - when functioning

Responsibilities:

1. Coordinate activities of orientation programs during the September and February (mid-semester) Orientation period.
2. Coordinate calendar dates for various programs.
3. Discuss future orientation programs in light of developing collegiate structure.
4. Evaluate effectiveness of orientation programs.
5. Coordinate research needs of various programs.
6. Responsibility for orientation programs and needs not specifically designated to any particular group - encouraging faculty and departmental orientation programs.
7. Coordinate information exchanged from various orientation programs.

University Theme Steering Committee

Compositions:

1. Coordinator from Division of Student Affairs
2. 3 Faculty members
3. 5 student representatives
4. Representative for the Office of the President
5. Representative for the Office of the Vice President for Academic Development
6. Representative for the Center for the Study of Higher Education

Responsibilities:

1. Selection of the University Theme
2. Coordinate and develop activities for the program
3. Prepare final report

September Orientation Committee - Student Affairs

Compositions:

1. Members from the Division of Student Affairs
2. Norton Hall activity coordinators
3. Representatives from student government - Student Association and Graduate Student Association

4. Representatives from faculty
5. U.C. representatives from Summer Conference Planning Board
6. Office of Foreign Student Affairs

Responsibilities:

1. Coordinate September orientation program with SPCPB, faculty orientation, group student orientation and University Theme.
2. Plan cultural, social activities during program
3. Work with SPCPB program for continuation of summer orientation program and special orientation of transfer and freshmen students

Faculty Orientation Steering Committee (Office of the President)

Composition:

1. Representatives from each of the seven Faculties

Responsibilities:

1. Coordinate and design orientation for new faculty with Faculties, Departments, and University Theme
2. Design special orientation for foreign faculty

Foreign Student Orientation

Composition:

1. Office of International Education
2. Office of Foreign Student Affairs
3. Student representatives from Student Association, Graduate Student Association
4. Faculty member
5. U.C. and Graduate School representatives

Responsibilities:

1. Design and coordinate orientation program for new foreign students with September Orientation and University Theme.

Planning Board-University College

Composition:

1. Coordinator
2. UC Adviser
3. Faculty member elected from faculty participants
4. Student member elected from student participants
5. Student representative from the Student Association
6. Student Affairs representation-September orientation, summer activities
7. Consultant

Responsibilities:

1. Coordinate and design the summer planning conferences for freshmen students
2. Coordinate and design the summer planning conference for transfer students
3. Evaluation of summer planning conferences
4. Coordinate with September orientation the specific advisement and orientation needs of transfers and freshmen students.

Program Design:

1. Specific advisement-registration needs
2. Faculty-upperclass student-new student discussion groups
3. Social activities

Facilities, resources, personnel:

1. Coordinator - responsible for overall administration of program and link with September Orientation Committee as well as University Orientation Committee.
2. Advisement staff - responsible for individual and group advisement on academic requirements and registration procedures. Aid in planning first semester courses (With college development this phase will have to be more closely coordinated with individual college advisement)
3. Faculty participants - 15-20 faculty and University staff responsible for participating in small group meetings.[1]
4. Student aides - 15-20 upperclass students responsible for aiding the student in registration, advisement process and participating in small group orientation discussion.[2-3]
5. Student personnel staff a) organize social and cultural activities for conferences; b) personnel from office of Student Affairs, Financial Aid, Off-Campus Housing, Placement Services.
6. Consultant - aid the planning group in designing small group activities for maximum effectiveness. Aid in goal setting and evaluation. Design training session for faculty and upperclass participants.

1. Also involved as faculty advisers for special "continual" experimental conference in the Fall.
2. For transfer conference it might be advisable to use transfer upperclassmen.
3. All Faculty-student participants will be asked to attend a program designed to inform them of University activities and operations as well as prepare them for more effective use of group time.

A P P E N D I C E S

APPENDIX I

Freshmen Orientation

Background

The orientation program for first year students has been approached in two separate programs: The Summer Planning Conference, conducted by the University College and its advisement staff, and the September orientation program, conducted by the Student Association and the Division of Student Affairs.

Summer Planning

The Summer Planning Conference has been in existence for many years, probably instituted while the University was still a small private institution. It affords freshmen the opportunity to pre-register, plan their first semester academic program and become familiar with some of the information and procedures for planning their academic careers.

In addition, the University Testing Services perform a number of psychological tests, as well as the student data questionnaire used to prepare valuable profiles for the incoming class. The Service provides a number of placement tests for languages and the sciences primarily, helpful to the student and his adviser in planning his academic program.

The conference, recently restructured, also provides an opportunity for academic advisers to become acquainted with their advisees.

The conferences are 2½ days in length. There are usually two conferences held each week beginning early July to Mid-August. Freshmen are urged to attend the conferences but it is not mandatory. Students are given some choice in selecting a conference and are required to pay a fee of about $20 if they opt to attend. The conference is operated on an income--offset budget--the fee covering the cost of room and board in the University

dormitories, the conference information packet and the student handbook.

The Summer Planning Conference provides an excellent opportunity for students to become familiar with the University and some of its facilities. All attempts are made for a commuting student to room with a resident student during the brief stay in the dormitories. Often this is the only time a commuting student enters a campus dormitory and more important this time represents his initial and sometimes only exposure to resident students. The relationships formed are certainly some of the most valuable to new students and are an important part and strong asset of the conference.

Exposure to the campus and some of its facilities are another very valuable part of the conference. Either through tour or lecture, students may learn about some of the services provided by the Office of Student Affairs. This time also enables students who will be living off-campus an opportunity to meet other students in a similar situation and take advantage of the off-campus housing service. Students have time and again expressed their approval and appreciation for the talks given by the Vice-President for Student Affairs, or members of his staff. These talks were given during special meetin designed to introduce new students to campus activities, resident living and some special activities like the music ensembles, student government and campus publications. Social activities: concerts, films, mixers, excursions are planned by the Norton Hall Activities Staff and are included as part of the 2½ day schedule.

Students meet with their advisers initially in small groups of 12-20. Each group is also assigned a student aide. These aides, some 8-10 upper class students, are hired to act as group leaders, tour guides and also

aid the student in completing the mechanics of registration.

During the group meetings with advisers information about the University, program requirements and registration procedures are discussed. In addition to questions on grading, the credit system, the baccalaureate degree and the University lecture and seminar.

Individual advisement for each student is also scheduled during the 2½ day period. With the aid of the high school record, the University catalog, placement tests and the interview, the student and the adviser plan the student's first semester schedule. Individual questions and problems are handled through these meetings.

As originally designed the group meetings between advisers and new students were to continue into the first semester. They provided an excellent opportunity to build the adviser relationship and present the incoming student with a contact group for developing relationships and answering the many questions during the first semester.

A lecture, given by a faculty member teaching in the summer session is also scheduled into the conference. These have proved of benefit to some students depending upon their interests and the personality of the lecturer. Very little other contact is made with the faculty, other than a scheduled short, informal gathering of faculty and students followed by luncheon.

The summer planning conferences are an extremely valuable program in preparing freshmen for their University careers. Although they have never been considered "orientation" they certainly perform an important part of that function.

The September Freshmen Orientation

The September Orientation Program is planned by the Division of Student Affairs and the Student Association. It is supported by a mandatory fee collected from all new students.

The program consists of a variety of activities: lectures, panel discussions, mixers and concerts usually scheduled during a period of time before September registration. The program has been scheduled over as long a period as five days to as short as a two-day period. The shorter time period has proved the most successful and enjoyable.

The program enables freshmen to get acquainted with the University, the residence halls and the City of Buffalo. Although the program has offered a variety of excellent lectures and panels on current University and social problems, it has never been noted for creating any kind of exciting academic fevor. The program is primarily one of social and cultural orientation to the University and has been advantageous as a period of adjustment to University life, especially for resident students.

There are many scheduled activities during the days of the orientation program. The panels and lectures are often attended by returning upperclassmen and faculty. Also scheduled during the orientation is a special academic procession and convocation given by the President of the University and the student body president. This too is intended to present the incoming freshmen to the tradition of academe. The addresses represent a kind of state of the union.

A number of volunteer upperclass students are available and designated as "student sponsors". They are available as information givers, tour guides, and serve in anyother useful capacity to students who request help. Except for meetings in the residence halls, freshmen students do not meet in regularly scheduled small groups during the orientation days although, volunteer small group sessions were available. Very little faculty-student contact is made, formally or informally.

APPENDIX II

The Experimental Freshman Summer Planning Conference

State University of New York at Buffalo

Preliminary Report*

INTRODUCTION

This report is based on a preliminary study of the results of an evaluation of the experimental Summer Planning Conference held at SUNY/Buffalo during July, 1968. The experimental conference was planned and carried out jointly by members of the faculty, Division of Student Affairs, Counseling Center, University Advisers, and University Housing Office.** In part, the conference followed the standard pattern of providing 2½ days during which freshmen could meet with advisers and register, and begin to acquaint themselves with each other and the university. However a number of activities, including a class visit, a campus tour, a faculty lecture, and a talk by a member of the Student Affairs Division, were eliminated in the experimental conference; they were replaced by a series of discussions, primarily in small groups, that intensified the opportunity for interaction around topics of concern to students. These groups, which met for a total of about 15 hours at intervals during the conference, had discussion leaders whose primary job was to facilitate and guide communication. The purpose of the discussion was to help students become more actively involved in thinking and talking about their new environment at the university, and in exploring alternative ways of dealing with it.

*This report was prepared by John Andrews, Policy Sciences Program, and Helen Wyant, University Research. It will be followed by a more completely documented report to appear in February, 1969.

**The central planning staff for the experimental conference were: Dr. John Andrews, Policy Sciences Program; Mr. James Beckley, then Asst. to the Provost, Faculty of Social Sciences and Administration; and Dr. John Wipf, Student Counseling Center.

The Evaluation Study

Social innovations can be most effectively implemented and built upon if their impact is carefully studies and understood. To this end, research was carried out by members of the planning staff at the time of the conference. Subsequently, in the fall of 1968, interviews were conducted with a randomly selected sample of 35 experimental conference members and with 35 students randomly chosen from the other eleven conferences. The findings discussed here are drawn from students' responses to the interview questions concerning their summer planning experiences.

Effectiveness of the Experimental and Standard Conferences

The first point to be emphasized is that both types of conferences were considered definitely valuable by most students. Both the students' needs for an early opportunity to learn some basic facts about the university and get a preliminary feel for what it is like, and to begin to get to know their fellow students. Broadly speaking, then, the value of a Summer Planning Conference of some kind seems clearly established.

There were, however, also many differences between the experimental and standard conferences. The optional activities in the experimental conference were considered by students to be substantially more interesting than those of the standard conferences, and were better attended. The typical student went to 80% of these events in the experimental conference, and to only 40% of such events in the standard conferences. When students were asked for reactions to specific meetings or events, about 80% of the comments in the experimental conference were positive, whereas the majority of comments about standard conference events were negative. The one exception was the talk, in the standard conferences by a member of the Student

Affairs Division, which was widely appreciated. The nature of negative comments also varied: students more often complained that the experimental conference activities were "confusing" or "upsetting", while the standard conference activities were more often criticized as "boring" or "irrelevant".

Specific Benefits of Experimental Conference

In the interviews, students described their reactions to specific events and to the conference as a whole, and from these descriptions it is possible to gain an impression of how they felt they had benefited from it. They indicate strongly that two types of benefits predominated. The first of these may be called "social learning"; that is, students learned about other individuals and social situations in ways that led them to revise expectations and stereotypes, to alter attitudes and feelings, to understand themselves better, and in some cases to behave differently. For example, the first session, which provided an unstructured opportunity for students to talk with people from many parts of the university, evoked this response from one participant:

> It was open, with student and teacher on the same level. I get angry at a teacher -- yelled at him. We found we have a right to individual opinions. If affected me this fall -- it got me to act more on my desires, get into things -- to take the step and get out of the apathy of high school.

A less positive comment on the same session was the following:

> It was chaotic, its new to question things --student freedom. I never gave it much thought before. You should prepare students more (for the discussion session).

"Social learning" of the sort discussed here is also indicated by these comments (from several students) on the third session, an exercise in non-verbal communication:

> It shows you can communicate without saying anything...I realized I'm part of a group, not just a bump on a log...I realized I always sit on the outside of a group -- this fall I found myself sitting in the middle and it really surprised me...I saw the other students were people, not just brains I couldn't talk to or compete with...

A second major benefit was social contact, primarily with other students. While all conferences provided some opportunity for such contact, through group activities and dormitory living, the experimental conference provided much more by actively facilitating student-student encounters in group meetings. This was frequently mentioned as a very satisfying experience; students stressed the value of beginning the acquaintance process in a smaller group than they would meet in the fall, and of having friends they could seek out when they arrived in September. This sort of social contact is of course related to "social learning", and certainly many situations provide opportunities for both; they differ, however, in the important respect that contact is a matter of forming relationships with others, while social learning is concerned with revising and developing one's picture of the environment.

Students' comments indicate that the discussion leaders in the experimental conference were quite important, and in some cases may have been critical in making the experience a success. In particular, it may well be that the presence of leaders helped to generate the social learning that was one of the distinctive characteristics of the experimental conference, since their function was in part to help students reflect on their experiences in discussion groups and elsewhere.

The roles of student advisers and student aides were not altered in the experimental conference. Students felt on the whole that these personnel were helpful in academic advisement, but unconcerned with other areas; they

were perceived as quite unrelated to the activities and concerns of the group discussion program. Some students said the aides had been very helpful in sharing with freshmen their own college experiences, but many also felt that more of this should be done. Evidently, there are ways in which student aides may be able to contribute more to the social learning process.

Discussion of Specific Activities in the Experimental Program

The interview data also make it possible to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of specific elements of the experimental conference. The opening session, which exposed students to a confusing welter of new people and ambiguous expectations, polarized the group; it was perceived as either a stimulating way of getting people out of ruts and preparing them for new independence, or as chaotic and pointless. From the group holding this latter view, a common complaint was "We didn't know what questions to ask" of the university resource people who were on hand. The second session, a topical discussion in which people were asked to assume various group-participation roles (e.g., "mediator", "leader"), served to help people get better acquainted and also to make them more aware of their own modes of group involvement. Frequently even those who liked the discussion quite well could not remember the topic, which suggests that at this time contact and social learning took precedence over the exploration of more abstract issues. The third session, a series of non-verbal communication exercises, was thought the most valuable; it made people feel closed to each other, and also produced considerable learning about self and group behavior. Session four, in which students expressed and compared the expectations that males and females have of each other, was considered

stimulating by many, though there seemed to be some groups that never really dug into the problem. By contrast, the session that began with a faculty lecture and went on to discuss the group processes occurring in the class, was sparsely attended -- perhaps because it was the last regular session of the program -- and was considered generally uninspiring. The final, summary session was missed by many who went home early; some of those who stayed found it very satisfying while others did not. Since this was an unstructured session, the leader's effectiveness probably played especially crucial role here.

Discussion

The experimental conference has met its original goals of providing a more stimulating and involving experience for freshmen at Summer Planning Conferences. This enrichment involved primarily learning about others -- students, faculty, administration -- and forming relationships, chiefly friendships with other students. This is an understandable outcome in that discussion groups are good vehicles for enhancing this sort of experience, but it may be also that these are the central needs of students at this stage of the transition to college. There are indications that they preferred to focus on these issues even when other opportunities (e.g., for acquiring more factual information or discussing conceptual problems) were present. Such a conclusion is consistent with Erik Erikson's developmental theory (see his Childhood and Society) which states that the major psychosocial task of this age-group is wrestling with the issue of "Intimacy versus Isolation"; in a new environment, orienting to the social landscape of one's peer world would be a primary necessity.

Speaking more broadly, it is often acknowledged that social growth is one of the main unformalized products of a college education; the approaches used in the experimental conference suggest ways in which the university can more self-consciously contribute to this important process.

Perspectives for the Future

This report is not the place to develop specific plans for future Summer Planning Conferences or allied programs. Yet at this point several things seem clear: first, even in its present standard form the conference program is a highly valuable experience for most students; second, the experimental conference was a significiant improvement in providing a meaningful experience for students; and finally, the research data suggest many specific ways in which still better conferences could be developed It seems very much worhhwhile to provide opportunities for this experimentation to be carried further.